



Strategic Plan 1999 – 2000, Priority #2: Improve the food protection program to decrease illnesses associated with food establishments.

Foodborne illnesses are under-reported, not just in District IV, but in the nation as a whole. The number of people calling to report possible foodborne illness is dependent upon what is happening in the community or the nation. Figure 3 illustrates the effect that itinerant events can have on the number of complaints or reports received. The Boise River Festival is held in June, the Western Idaho Fair, in August, and Art in the Park, in September. The number of foodborne illness complaints is consistently higher around the time of these events. Additionally, if there is a major local foodborne illness outbreak, more people will call with concerns. The spike in August 1999 (figure 3) corresponds with a large outbreak that received coverage by local media.

CDHD's environmental health staff has long realized the importance of critical food safety issues and has focused on these items during facility inspections. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has identified five broadly categorized risk factors that contribute significantly to the incidence of foodborne illness. These risk factor categories are:

1. Food from unsafe sources
2. Inadequate cooking
3. Improper holding (storage) temperatures
4. Cross contamination
5. Poor personal hygiene

At CDHD, we have observed these five critical items more than 62% during our routine inspections over the last three years. During 2000, staff conducted 2,074 inspections in 1,950 establishments. The total number of critical items noted was 1,328. This risk-based performance approach is effective but more difficult to standardize for both inspectors and industry. Guided by these five critical areas, we will be working closely with the food service industry towards solutions to procedural and practical problems that are far more difficult to manage than the previous emphasis on the cleaning and maintenance of equipment.

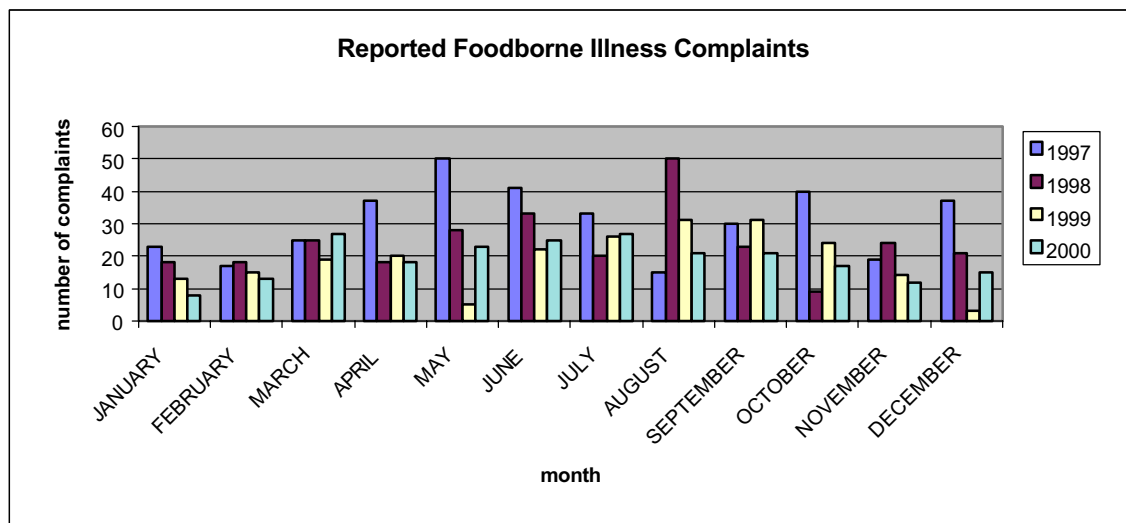


Figure 3

A baseline assessment of District IV food establishments will be conducted in the coming year so that CDHD's findings may be compared to the recently published national baseline. Staff will continue to stress the five critical items during facility inspections, food safety training sessions, and through newsletters.

The cross over effects of public health efforts can be seen in the declining incidence of hepatitis A. The focus on the five critical areas, coupled with the availability of hepatitis A vaccine in 1995, has had a dramatic impact on the incidence of hepatitis A in District IV. Although there are many factors, the difficult task of addressing personal hygiene issues with food service workers directly impacts the decline of hepatitis A, shown in figure 4.

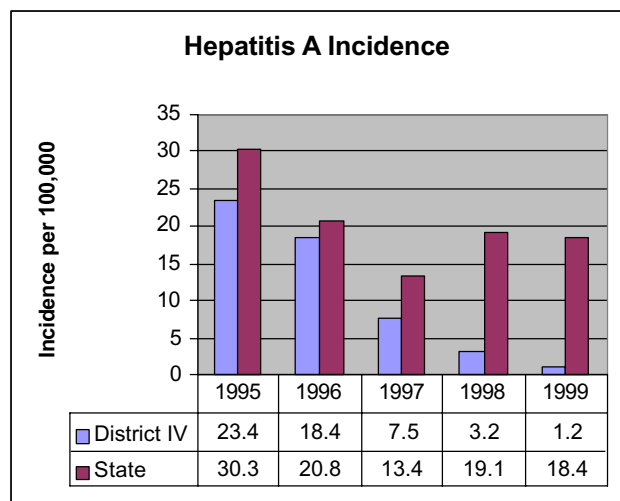
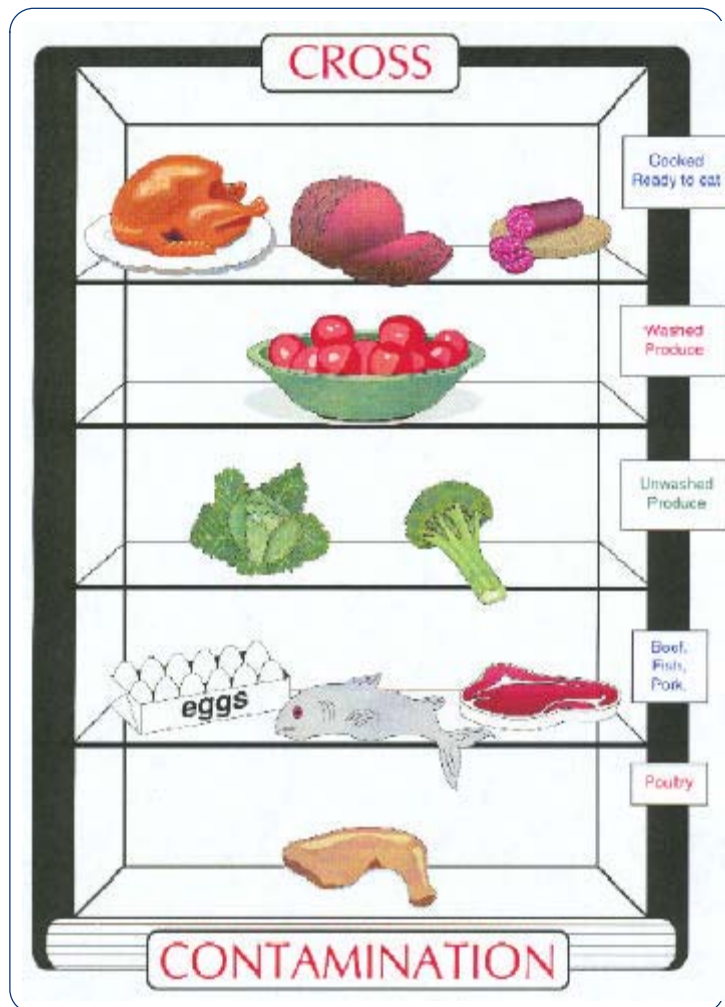
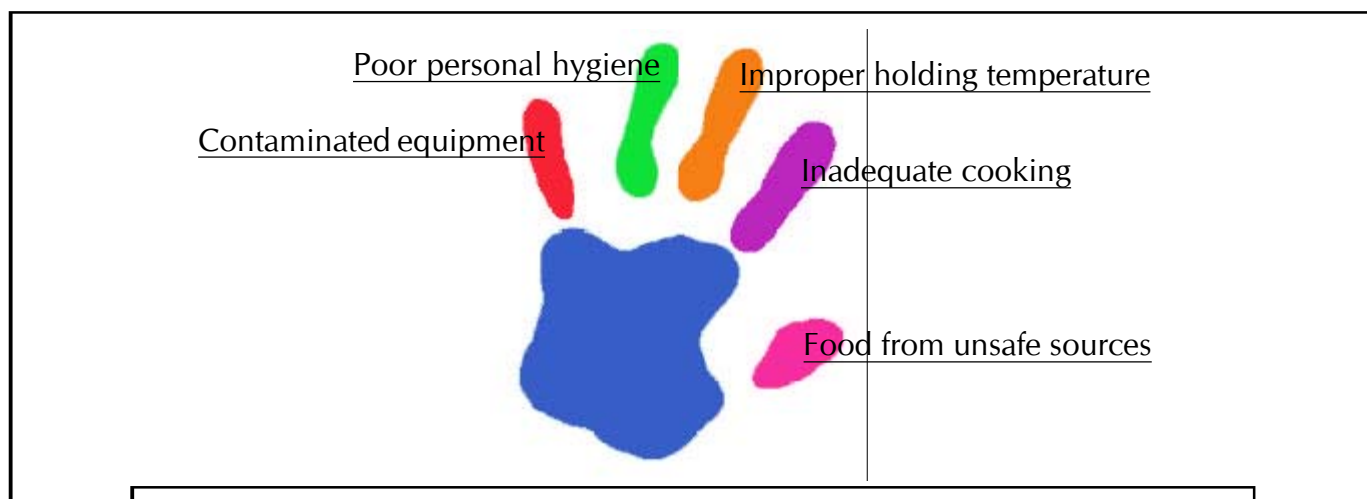


Figure 4



Cross-contamination:

(The transfer of disease causing organisms to ready-to-eat foods.)



Our direction for the future is to evaluate the occurrence of the five (5) critical foodborne illness risk factors as identified by the FDA. We recognize that the level of foodborne illness would be the ideal retail food program indicator. The occurrence of foodborne illness, however, is grossly underreported which makes it an unreliable program measurement.